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SOCIAL AMUSEMENT.

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DANCING.

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BY

REV. J. B. COUNTRYMAN.

— OF THE —

GENESEE ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

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CUBA, N. Y.

1890.





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1890

# DANCING.

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A POPULAR FORM OF SOCIAL AMUSEMENT  
VIEWED FROM A CHRISTIAN  
STANDPOINT.

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BY

REV. J. B. COUNTRYMAN.

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE OLEAN DISTRICT  
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1890.

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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
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California

## “A TIME TO DANCE”—Ecclesiastes, 3:4

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Do not imagine that everyone who speaks or writes with disapprobation upon the subject of dancing is an old foggy, a soured misanthrope, or a religious crank. We do not object to people, young or old, having a good time and being happy.

Far be it from us to utter anathemas against proper recreations. We believe in amusements, but do not estimate the question “how can I be most amused and find most pleasure?” to be all-important, or equal to “what must I do to be saved?”

We will endeavor to consider this subject fairly, from the standpoint of a Christian minister, with a sincere desire that good may result. We are aware that ecclesiastical authority alone cannot settle the question. Each person should candidly examine the facts, weigh the arguments and decide according to his own convictions.

If a young person aim at self-culture and the attainment of the highest manhood or fairest womanhood; if he or she is anxious to act with the soundest wisdom and ambitious to attain the purest and noblest character and to set the best and safest example, to please God rather than the world, we will endeavor to assist in determining a line of policy with reference to the dance.

### SOCIETY'S VERDICT.

When we approach the question of social amusements, we touch a delicate subject, we must move with caution. “Society” has something to say, and demands a hearing. But “Society” is no more a friend to the church than the “world is a friend to grace.” It is ever ready to dictate concerning morals and church prerogatives, and decide questions of religion. But how and when did it acquire the right to make rules for Christian people? Has it been characterized by high ideals of purity and holiness? Have its chief objects been the good of the race, the promotion of sterling integrity, and to please the Divine Father?

The key-note of 'Society' is self gratification. It favors the world and the flesh—extravagance, hypocrisy, affectation, rivalry, dishonesty. It places first what people say and do, and it would silence the voice of conscience by popular verdicts. And shall its opinion of morals, and sneers at modesty, good taste, true culture and Christian conscientiousness, have controlling influence with the followers of Jesus?

Before we can accept its dictum, it must extol the enjoyment of intelligence and self-control and Christ-like devotion, and find rest and recreation in rational activity and "imperil no young life by exciting latent energies of evil."

Some assert that this is not an appropriate theme for ministerial discourse. It will offend modesty. The discussion will touch the delicate questions of social purity. Friends cannot defend it nor enemies attack it without alluding to things offensive to refined taste.

This admission declares dancing to be of doubtful propriety, and that the faithful pastor should warn the people from the border line of indulgence; that he should not "stand with shut eyes and dumb tongue while his young people cover with the cloak of their respectability this chosen highway by which libertines gain access to good homes, and so blight heedless lives."

#### DANCING HAS NO SUPPORT FROM THE BIBLE.

We are convinced that the modern dance has no support from the Bible. The text we place at the head of this article is included in a catalogue of the vanities of human events—"a time to kill," "a time to hate," etc. Does God approve hatred or murder? He permits us to decide what our lives shall be, but assures us that He will "judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every purpose and every work." The dance mentioned in Scripture without disapproval, was not a promiscuous mingling of men and women.

The commended dance was a religious service, but never permanently attached to religious worship. Jephtha's daughter came forth *alone* with timbrel and dance to meet her father. The *women* came out of all the cities, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul. Miriam "took a timbrel and all the *women* went out after her with timbrels and dances."

The cyclopedia says, "the Jewish dance was performed by the sexes separately."

There is no evidence from sacred history that the diversion was pro-



miscuously enjoyed, except it might be at the erection of the deified calf, when all classes mingled in the frantic revelry, and danced in shameless nudity.

The early religious dances were simply processions in which they marched and chanted, and they differed much from modern dances and midnight balls. "David danced before the Lord." In early times those who perverted the exercise from a sacred use to purposes of amusement, were considered sacrilegious and profane. The Romans counted it disgraceful for a free citizen to dance, except as a religious rite. The "eating and drinking and dancing" of the Amalekites is recorded in the Bible, as is the people's "rising up to play" (including a revelling dance) with tacit censure. One distinguishing feature of the wicked, mentioned by Job, is, "their children dance."

Even heathen religions do not all favor promiscuous dancing. Sau-ah-Brah says "the Burmese only dance around the dead, and one at a time." A Flathead Indian said to Gen. Clark, "you allow your women to dance, we do not ours."

#### A DISTINCTION URGED.

But advocates for the dance insist on making a distinction. Few attempt to defend the German or round dances. They are said to be shameful, immodest and offensive to morals and refinement. Dr. Crane asks "how dare a young man propose any such performance to a lady for whom he has a shadow of respect? How can a young lady who respects herself submit to it?" But cotillions and quadrilles we are told are different; they are modest, graceful, and harmless. Doubtless there is a difference. There is a difference between varioloid and small-pox, but who would urge a friend to have the small-pox, only be sure and have the milder form. The square dance is almost sure to be rounded off.

#### NOT GOOD RECREATION.

Dancing as usually practiced lacks the element of true recreation. It is a severe strain upon the weak, and frequently over-taxes and exhausts the vigor of the strong. A single night thus spent will leave its visible mark in haggard looks, as a protest against the dissipation.

It is absurd to call dancing good exercise. There are gymnasiums for men and women, built under the direction of scientific experts, but none have dancing halls. Says Dr. Hays, "No physician ever advised dancing except to increase his practice." Prof. Sargent of Harvard College says, "To say nothing of the moral effect, the prac-

tice of dancing from eight o'clock in the evening until four in the morning is simply barbarous."

#### DANGEROUS FASCINATION.

Dancing has a growing fascination for those who indulge. It is folly to send children to dancing school and then try to confine their performances within the family circle. It cultivates a love of display and a thirst for the applause and excitement of the ball-room, and once attracted there, the influences will be detrimental to soul and body. The first step in the wrong direction should be avoided. The late hours, confined atmosphere, style of dress and refreshments, excessive and long-continued exertion, the transition from the heated room to the chill night air, are not safe, as many an early grave can testify. Nine persons died as the result of exhaustion and exposure incurred at a dancing party in Alabama.

"Sin, like a bee, into the hive may bring  
A little honey, but expect the sting."

Those who indulge in private dances, generally make exceptions in case of "college promenades," "receptions," "firemen's balls," "masonic balls," "inauguration balls," "charity balls" and all others they wish to attend. "All streams run to the ocean." A young husband said his wife had "acquired such a love for it that she would dance with the devil for lack of a better partner."

Dancing has a bad historic name. In Rome, Athens and Ephesus it was practiced mainly by the degraded and vile. The dancers of Egypt of the present day are of the same character. The Nauch girls of India are accomplished in the art. There are no viler spots on the face of the earth than the dance houses of our large cities. Who would think of admitting a professional dancing girl into good society?

#### BAD ASSOCIATIONS.

The associations are bad. The ball-room and the bar-room are generally neighbors. A violinist of one of our cities, who spent much of his time playing for dancing parties, told us that very few attended dances who did not drink liquor. As they became weary, gentlemen and ladies required a stimulant, and employed wine and other liquors to brace up for continued exertion. Dancing prevails less as you ascend the scale of intelligence, virtue and religion. Like the deluge, the lowest places are filled first, but unlike the deluge, there are heights it never reaches. Cicero declared that "no one dances unless he is either drunk or mad."

## CULTURE NOT ESSENTIAL.

A developed brain and a cultured intellect are not necessary to learn the art. When we see grown people skipping in the dance, we are almost converted to Darwinism, and imagine the evolution not quite complete. A peculiarity of young ostriches is their waltzing proclivities. On being let out of their enclosure in the morning, their balancing and gyrations are said to be a comical caricature of the human dance. Barnum's elephants perform the quadrille. Bears and dogs are trained to dance and used to increase the revenue of strolling mendicants.

## DOES NOT PROMOTE INTELLIGENCE.

It is a foe to intellectual growth. Those who are applauded as "beautiful dancers" are usually good for nothing else. What young man seeking a situation, would wish to have added to his diploma or recommendation, "he is a first-class dancer?" It would spoil his prospects. It sadly interferes with the students work. A principal of an academy was annoyed one winter by dancing parties that were patronized by his scholars; so he divided his school into two parts, the dancing section and the studying section, "for," said he, "it is not fair to make brains compete with heels, and those who come here to make the most of their chances for education must not be kept back by those who give themselves up to the unprofitable exercise of dancing. You can't give due attention to both pursuits."

Thackeray said, "When a man confesses himself fond of dancing, I set him down as a fool." Daniel Webster, when asked why he did not dance, replied sarcastically, "I have not brains enough."

## EXTRAVAGANT.

It is a useless expense. Many a young man who "cannot afford" to buy books or attend a lecture course, or help in some benevolent work, will sometimes spend as much as ten or fifteen dollars for a grand ball or series of dances. Ladies who "cannot afford" to belong to a reading circle or take a first-class magazine, will often spend large amounts on elegant ball dresses, that are not fit to be worn on any other occasion.

The aggregate thus spent would go far towards sustaining public libraries and reading rooms for the promotion of intellectual growth in every town.

## INCONSISTANT WITH SERIOUSNESS AND DESTRUCTIVE TO RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS.

Dancing is inconsistent with seriousness and devotion. This is the reason ministers and Christians of the more fervent and consistent sort so strongly oppose it, and church conventions, assemblies and conferences pass such strong resolutions against it. The prohibition of dancing as an amusement abounds in the writings of church fathers and in the decrees of the councils.

Many have danced away their convictions. A minister was called to stand by the bedside of a beautiful young mother whose life was fast ebbing away. Prayer was proposed. Her reply was, "I have no objection, but prayers will be of no avail now, it is too late." In early life she had been deeply impressed with the importance of religion, but, she said, "my mother sent me to dancing school, and I danced all my convictions away." She died as she had lived, without Christ.

A man who had been a consistent member of the church, consented one evening to take his daughter to a ball. By that act he renounced his religion, and never went again to the house of prayer. Spurgeon says, "The caperings and wantonings of the ball-room are death to the solemn influences of our ministry, and many an ill-ended life first received its bent for evil amid the flippancies of gay assemblies, met to trip away the hours."

Christians have a right to all that is really good, but tastes are to be rectified. Nominal Christians may be found at balls, but rarely, if ever, one of earnest devotion. Those who patronize dancing parties are not the ones who sustain the prayer meetings. Who would dare pray "Lord, lead me not into temptation," and then go deliberately to a dance? A young lady asked Bishop Coxe, "Can I dance if I become a Christian?" He replied, "If you become a Christian you will not want to dance." Says Evangelist Moody, "Get the young people interested in the Lord's work, and they won't want dancing." Rev. A. T. Pierson, D. D., said to his young parishioners, "The modern dance is to me especially abhorrent; for one, I will not put myself where I am compelled even to look upon it. I am too well acquainted with both its origin and history to countenance it, and after watching for twenty-five years its effects upon modern society, I have set my face forever against it, as an iniquity and a snare."

During the winter of 1887, a great revival occurred at Springville,



N. Y. That season religious influences were so strong that dancing parties were discontinued and the club formed for that purpose was disbanded. Converts in the experience of a new-found joy said they never would dance again. Some, however, by neglect of religious duties, became indifferent and backsliden, and compromised their convictions, and seriously damaged their religious influence by yielding again to the enticement of the dance.

#### BADGE OF UNGODLINESS.

Dancing is the badge of ungodliness, whatever be the excuses made for it, and the special pleadings that it is innocent. The worldling uses the example of dancing professors of religion, as an opiate to quiet his conscience. No one can make use of an amusement that weakens his example for good, and be innocent.

"It were better for a Christian to lose his right hand than to indulge in any pleasure which will lead his ungodly associates to discount the sincerity of his religious profession."

The liveliest imagination can see no good in the performance. If no worse, it certainly is a weight that should be laid aside by those who run the Christian race.

The world does not estimate very highly a religion that exerts but little or no control over those who profess it. It has but little faith in the piety of a dancing Christian.

Prof. Finney said, "I have had as much enjoyment as is probably best for men to have in this life, and never for an hour have I had the desire to return back and seek enjoyment from anything the world can give."

The religion of our Lord Jesus Christ lifts us into a higher plane of life and enjoyment.

A young lady eighteen years of age, of high social standing, was hopefully converted, and decided to unite with the church. She asked the pastor, "If I join the church may I dance?" He replied, "Suppose there was a large and fashionable ball in town and you were invited, and going a little late you should find all engaged in dancing, and me, your pastor, taking part in it and leading it, what would you think?" A look of surprise passed over her face as she frankly said, "I should think it very strange and greatly inconsistent." "Well," he replied, "if dancing is right and a good thing, why should I not enjoy it as well as you? There are not two standards or rules of Christian living, one for members and another for the pastor." She

thought a moment seriously, and then said, "It is plain to me now, I will never dance again."

If it is proper for Christians to dance, why not have a ball-room attached to the church? We are to do all to the glory of God. Who dances for such a purpose? Proper recreation is for health, and consequently for God's glory. We can ask God's blessing upon our amusements when they are taken with the purpose of recreating our powers.

Did you ever know a revival of religion to be promoted by a dance? We have known some to be seriously hindered thereby. Did you ever know a person of deep religious experience to ask "do you think there is any harm in dancing?" Are you a Christian and want to dance?

A dancing master at Sunbury, Pa., attended a Methodist revival meeting and was converted. He went to his next dancing school, but only to tell them what the Lord had done for his soul, and that he had renounced the world.

A young lady who was instrumental in getting up a series of dancing parties, was converted, and said she wondered that she ever could have enjoyed the dance. Another young lady regretted very deeply that she had yielded to deceptive allurements and attended dancing school. She said to a friend, "Why did you not tell me that I was a fool?"

If anyone does claim to dance for the glory of God, in order to be consistent, would it not be best for him to join the Shakers?

Whoever dares to walk very near the boundary line between right and wrong, will almost certainly transgress on the wrong side.

"It is somewhat fashionable to sneer at Puritanical strictness, but it is always dangerous—because it lowers the standard of conscientiousness."

#### TESTIMONY OF CHURCHES.

The best and most consistent and spiritual of all evangelical denominations have testified against the dance.

Bishop Whittle, Protestant Episcopal, of Virginia, said of round dances, "While Paul said to the church at Ephesus that it was a shame even to speak of those things done by some in secret, I should be ashamed even to speak as the truth would require of this thing done openly before all."

Bishop Hopkins said, "No ingenuity can make dancing consistent with the covenant of baptism."

Bishop Pierce of the M. E. Church, South, says, "I confess I have no patience with it, no toleration of it. I think it the silliest, most nonsensical amusement that rational beings, so called, ever engaged in. It is heathenism in its origin, a pastime of savages; it is a part of idolatrous worship, lewd, sensual, obscene. It has been refined, polished, I grant, but it cannot be dignified nor elevated."

Dr. Spring of Albany said, "Dancing has been a source of greater trouble to me in my church, than all other causes of disquiet combined."

Dr. Howard Crosby said, "In regard to waltzes, polkas and such-like, a Christian ought not to hesitate an instant, any more than he should about thieving or lying. The foundation of domestic misery and ruin which startle us often in its public outcropping, was laid when parents allowed the sacredness of their daughter's persons and the purity of their maiden instincts to be rudely shocked in the waltz."

The official expression of the Roman Catholic Church is "that promiscuous dancing is pernicious to the highest, purest and best interests of social life." The effect of the dance is not an inference to this church, but a disclosure obtained in the confessional.

Even the semi-heathen system of Mohommedianism prohibits it. It comes into direct antagonism with the proper development of Christian life. It excites disrelish for religious associations. Nearly all Christian churches have passed prohibitory rules. Occasionally individual churches will so far forget the object of their existence as to offer indulgence as a premium for membership, or with unhallowed presumption use the dance to increase the revenue of the church. In Mexico the Catholics go still further, and have Sunday bull fights for the benefit of the church.

We copy the following from the local paper of Cuba, N. Y., "The Rector's Guild of Christ Church have arranged for a millinery social and dance." Another notice, "The phantom party at Palmer Opera House last evening was pleasurable, profitable and amusing, beyond all expectation. Masks were taken off shortly after ten o'clock, when refreshments were served. Dancing was then continued until midnight. The entertainment was arranged by the Rector's Guild of Christ Church." A masquerade ball under the auspices of Christ Church? A sacrilegious travesty on the sacred name! Yet this same church forbids dancing during its Lenten season, when it is making special efforts for growth in grace. Would it not be well to extend

the forty days of devotion and self-denial to three hundred and sixty-five ?

Bishop Whitaker, Protestant Episcopal, says, "When the church begins to offer amusements to stimulate an interest in its work and increase its membership, it will soon find that there are others in the business who can cater to that want a great deal more successfully than the church."

#### IT IMPERILS VIRTUE.

The larger Westminster catechism forbids dancing as one of the sins prohibited by the seventh commandment. Its tendency to licentiousness is not the least argument against it.

The N. Y. *Journal of Education* says, "The Chief of Police of New York City affirms that three-fourths of the abandoned girls of the city were ruined by dancing."

Ladies allow gentlemen privileges in dancing, which taken under any other circumstances would be considered improper. Byron describes it

"Round all the confines of the yielded waist,  
The stranger's hand may wander, undisplaced."

The fascination of the dance is not in the music, for you can find better music in other places. It is not in the congenial company, because you could have as good company elsewhere.

Sex is the spirit of the dance. Take it away and let the sexes dance separately and the amusement would soon go out of fashion. "It has the inevitable stimulation of the most inflammable of the passions and is fraught with terrible peril to personal purity and godly character."

"The dance whirls its giddy kaleidoscope around, bringing hearts so near that they almost beat against each other, mixing the warm mutual breaths, darting the fine, personal electricity across between the meeting fingers, flushing the face and lighting the eyes with a quick language, subject often to gross misinterpretation on the part of the vile-hearted."

It is not a matter of intellect and will alone, but also a question of physical nature, and as long as men and women are ordinary human beings, it is best to keep explosives away from flying sparks.

"Lie in the lap of sin and not mean harm?  
It is hypocrisy against the Devil."

Archbishop Spaulding declared that the confessional revealed the fact that nineteen out of every twenty who had fallen from virtue, dated the first step in their downward career to dancing parties.



Dr. Bushnell calls the dance "Contrived possibilities of license, which belong to high society only when it runs low."

Mrs. Gen. Sherman asserts, "Women of virtue should blush to have the dance named to them."

Gail Hamilton proclaims that "The thing in its very nature is unclean and cannot be washed. The very pose of the parties suggests impurity."

The Archbishop of Quebec speaks of the round dance as "the last sigh of expiring modesty."

What respectable woman would consent to be photographed in a waltz or round dance? Some insist that dancing is an innocent amusement. Are not facts against it? The tree is known by its fruits.

#### EXCUSES MADE.

It is said not to be as bad as some plays. This does not prove it right. If plays are sinful they should be stamped with the seal of condemnation also. There is, however, this distinction, plays remain but plays, simple and silly, perhaps, but without the fascinating and growing power. Sophists say "It is better to dance than to slander your neighbor." That may be, so perhaps it is not as bad to steal as to commit murder, but neither are right. Those who do not dance are not obliged to slander their neighbors. It is said dancing gives ease and grace of motion. Gracefulness of body will not compensate for gracelessness of heart. But does it promote gracefulness? Is it not an affected, stiff, mechanical movement, and inferior to the simple grace of nature?

I would nearly as soon send a boy to the saloon to learn the art of conversing elegantly as a girl to the ball-room to acquire grace or politeness.

Dr. Vincent said, "The last place on God's earth I would send a child to learn gentility and politeness is the dance. If I wished to destroy every vestige of gentility, I would send them to some dancing schools."

Dancing wastes time, impairs health, scatters serious thoughts, compromises Christian character and leads to entangling associations with frivolous minds and careless hearts. Are not the character, associations and tendencies of the dance only evil?

#### NEGATIVE DECISION.

If it weakens intellectual powers and damages spiritual life and moral influence, we should promptly decide against it. Said

a young lady who had given up dancing and become a Christian, "There is such a pleasure in a fixed decision." Do not let the world be the custodian of your conscience. Courteously but firmly say *no* when solicited to do what the church disapproves. Self-respect through loyalty to conviction is worth more than all the fun of a season.

"A ball was to be held at Long Branch, and it was deemed desirable to secure the patronage of a young, beautiful and accomplished lady by securing her services as manager. A member of Congress was selected to do this. All his influence of position, flattery and argument was lost upon her. She steadily rejected the proffered honor, and refused to attend the ball. "Would you be kind enough to give me your reason for refusal?" said the Congressman. "Certainly, Sir; I am a Christian, and I cannot attend without violating what I consider my religious obligations." He replied, "I have heard before of religious principle, but never saw it exemplified until now. From this hour I shall have a higher respect for Christian character."

#### CHRISTIAN'S DYING TESTIMONY AGAINST IT.

Did a dying Christian ever recommend the dance? A lady of our acquaintance was in the habit of going with thoughtless gaiety to nearly all the dances of the place. She was called to the bedside of a dying Christian sister, who solemnly warned her, and she there promised and gave up the dance forever.

About ten years ago a lady in Chicago protested warmly against Dr. Vincent's emphatic disapproval of the dance as a means of home recreation. She spoke of an intimate friend who had a model home, a perfect picture of taste, domestic affection, purity and Christian loyalty, and yet they danced and played cards as a matter of course, and saw no harm in it. Subsequently Bishop Vincent met the same lady. She said her dear friend, the one who defended the dance and card table at home, had died. "But to my surprise", she continued, "on her death-bed she called her children to her and said 'I want you to make me one promise, and that is, that you will never again while you live touch a card or engage in a dance. I see things in a different light now and I ask this favor.'" In that solemn hour the promise was readily given.

#### CONCLUSION.

Christianity does not require us always to dwell on the sober side of things. It does not especially favor the solemn visage and doleful strain.

It does not discourage vivacity nor repress laughter. But it does recognize the highest elements of our nature and the possibilities of satisfaction in those things that are worthy of our time and thought, and it does lift us toward God and into the sunlight of His countenance, so that we are joyful in the consciousness of His approval.

"True joy is a serious matter" says, Seneca. "Life is real, life is earnest," and we must look upon all its phases before we are prepared to enjoy it intelligently. Amusement is possible to one who knows nothing of life's experiences. A kitten can be amused. An angel can have enjoyment. There is a radical difference between enjoyment and amusement.

The study of either the esthetics or the morals of the dance will show it to be unworthy the patronage of a Christian, and whatever is not good for a Christian is not good for anybody. There is but one correct standard of morals for the human race.

Young people, if "Society" indulges in card-playing, wine-drinking and dancing, form your own society on a higher moral basis and with better prospect of obtaining real enjoyment. Cultivate independence of character. Have a will-power to do what conscience says is right. Why should not Christian young people be braver and more decided than worldly young people? Instead of being allured into evil ways why should they not, with stronger moral force and greater energy of character, win their worldly associates to the better way of thinking and living? Young people, never compromise your Christian character. Be strong for the right. If the best type of character is desirable, do not indulge in questionable practices. Abandon without hesitation whatever would hazard your safety. If your souls are worth saving, avoid that which is sinful, do not approach the dividing line. Do not countenance a mode of amusement, which, with its invariable associations, has allured many to ruin.

"Pluck one thread and the web ye mar;  
Break but one  
Of a thousand keys, and the paining jar  
Through all will run."

Do not let popular verdict, society usage, nor the exuberant life of the crowd, bent on fun and frolic, determine your course. Do not say as one did, "I'll go anyway. I'll risk it." It is a fearful thing to disobey the voice of God in your heart. Love and follow the self-denying Savior. Seek enjoyment in doing good.

"Turn thou thine eyes from each seducing sight,  
For looking whets the ready edge of appetite."









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